

A HEAL prescription for healthy people on a healthy planet 2024-2029

Being and staying healthy is not always an individual or lifestyle choice: our health also depends on the health of the natural world and on the environment we live in. Currently, our natural world and our health are out of balance.

Our air, food and water are polluted, while global heating, extreme weather and biodiversity loss affect our health and well-being negatively. The science and evidence on how pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss impact people's health has steadily increased and underlines the need for urgent action.

Pollution, from a cocktail of substances in the air, food, water and earth, impacts adults' and children's health even at low levels and at all ages. The irrevocable loss of species and plants deprives us of nutritional variety and future medicines, while heatwaves, floods and droughts from the accelerating climate crisis bring suffering and come at a high cost to our health.



People's exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals leads to at least €157 billion in health costs per year in Europe.



20% of early death and disease in Europe are due to pollution.



Global heating increases the frequency and severity of heatwaves. In the summer of 2022, 61,000 people in Europe lost their lives due to heat.



The European Union has been a leader in recognising and addressing the link between the deterioration of the natural world, the climate crisis and our health, and has adopted a series of measures and policy frameworks for healthy people on a healthy planet.

But the pace of measures and the level of ambition and action needs to be ramped up.

It is urgent to adopt and implement robust and coherent measures to prevent the worst health impacts linked to an unhealthy planet. There is still time to protect everyone's health, and especially the health of those most vulnerable.

With the elections in 2024 and a new policy cycle, the European Union can choose the path to better health. It can recognise the urgency to act, and adopt environmental and climate policies which accelerate the transformation that needs to happen in this decade.

We're all vulnerable to these health impacts, and some are more at risk than others, including children, pregnant women, the elderly, those already sick or facing health inequalities. Moreover, socio-economic inequalities in countries, and between countries in the EU, worsen the environmental and climate impacts on people's health.

The impacts from pollution and global heating include:

- Early death
- Heart and lung disease
- Cancer
- Harm to the body's hormone, immune and reproductive systems
- Neuro-developmental disease
- Behavioural impacts
- Depression and eco-anxiety



HEAL works to ensure that current and future generations can benefit from a clean environment to enjoy long and healthy lives. HEAL envisions a world that is free of health-harming chemicals, where the air we breathe and the food we eat are health promoting, and a future in which we have transitioned in a just way to a non-toxic, decarbonised, climate resilient and sustainable economy and way of life.



Ten pathways for better health 2024-2029



1

Protect the health of the most vulnerable

Pollution in the air, water, soil, in our food, in daily products can harm everyone, and is a particular risk for the most vulnerable.

Set EU policies which recognise vulnerabilities and set a level of ambition which protects them (e.g. strict clean air standards, swift pesticide reduction deadlines).



2

Recognise and act on the unhealthy connection between social inequalities and pollution

People living in poverty or facing economic hardships are at greater risk of health impacts from environmental and climate threats.

Recognise the interlinkages between social, environmental and health determinants and act upon them to ensure a just transition.



3

Invest in better health, not pollution

Public financing plays a key role in enabling the transformation towards healthy people on a healthy planet.

End all direct and indirect taxpayer financing of activities which harm health, the environment and the climate, especially when it comes to financing fossil fuels.



4

Place health at the centre of climate action

Europe is the most vulnerable region to impacts from heat, and the health impacts from climate change are increasingly being felt.

Adopt mitigation and adaptation measures which place health protection at the centre. This will result in significant health and economic shared benefits.



5

Stop burning fossil fuels for our health

The burning of oil, coal and gas fuels climate change and harms people's health directly through air pollution and indirectly by fuelling global heating.

Adopt timelines and plans to end the burning of all fossil fuels swiftly, and boost energy savings and renewables, without resorting to false solutions like burning wood.



6

Achieve clean air everywhere, for everyone's health

Air pollution is one of the top risk factors for chronic disease in Europe, leading to hundreds of thousands of early deaths each year and a wide range of preventable health impacts which cost billions in healthcare.

Show political leadership to drive forward science-based clean air laws, including strict clean air standards and stringent measures to cut pollution in all sectors.



7

Ramp up health measures for a non-toxic environment

The health burden from hazardous chemicals is unacceptably high and keeps growing. Preventing the fast-rising rate of non-communicable diseases, such as breast cancer and prostate cancer, obesity and diabetes as well as infertility and learning disorders, requires urgent improvements in EU laws.

Swiftly restrict harmful substances such as endocrine disruptors and PFAS, which are widely used in polluting materials such as plastics, pesticides and many everyday products. Safer alternatives are available.



8

Accelerate the reform of EU chemicals law REACH to safeguard health

The landmark EU chemicals law REACH is in dire need of reform, as the pace of restricting and phasing out chemicals has been woefully slow.

Put forward a health-protective update of the EU chemicals law REACH, truly implementing the 'no data, no market' principle, allowing for swifter restrictions of (groups of) substances, accounting for our real-life exposure to chemicals mixtures in risk management.



9

Step up action for a pesticide-free EU, for healthy food and healthy people

Europe's reliance on synthetic pesticides in agriculture, public and residential areas has harmed people's health and nature.

Adopt measures to swiftly reduce exposure to hazardous pesticides, including ending pesticide use in sensitive areas. This will prevent new cancer cases, disruption of the body's hormone system, reproductive disorders, and strengthen children's healthy development.



10

Step up on healthy mobility

Walking and cycling benefits people's health, the climate and clean air.

Prioritise and incentivise active mobility, especially in cities, together with a move towards accessible and affordable public transportation, as well as zero and low emission zones.

